

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times" a quote so renowned that it borders on cliché. Yet how aptly those words evoke the history that provoked my invitation to stand before this respected committee. The experiences in that history have left indelible marks, just as we all are changed by our choices. I have entered single and am now married to a devoted wife and we have been blessed with a beautiful baby boy. Only four years past I entered the doors of this school a blank slate waiting to be imprinted with a wealth of knowledge that this school had to offer. The training imparted to my classmates and I changed us from being receivers into givers of health and hope. It has brought reality to our aspirations of making a difference. Hindsight has endowed me with the clarity to understand how there were times that I was receptive to learning and there were times that my decisions did not allow me to be a good student. A book has been written detailing the triumphs and failures of my history here. I bare the pages of this book every time that I appear before this committee and it is ultimately your decision that writes the next chapter. We cannot change what has been written in the past, but together we can make the decisions that write a bright future.

Let us turn the pages back to the first chapter. It starts with a young man bright eyed and ecstatic at going to the school of his dreams; his first choice of medical schools. He was introduced to a warm community that welcomed him with open arms. He formed the first threads of strong bonds of friendships that would last a lifetime. As the pages flip in succession this story relates a student that performed poorly on his exams, failed his exams, and so to speak used quicksand to build the foundation of his future success. He could build a tower of exemplary grades, cultivate in his superiors a sense of confidence in his abilities, and watch the edifice, and his dreams along with it, crumble in a heap of rubble at a moments notice.

This however is not just a book, rather it is real life and that student stands before you today to see if this Committee will support him by allowing him a new construction site or will they leave him kicking the dust of the rubble off his shoes. The commitment that I have to Albert Einstein College of Medicine is rooted deeper than my own personal experiences here. I believe in the work of this school and I love the product that this school creates. Doctors who are real people that put themselves in the shoes of their patients. Doctors who respect the beliefs of their patients because they are taught in an environment that respects their own beliefs. I see these qualities in my friends that I study, live, and pray with and I hope to emulate and learn from many of their qualities. The full support of this committee will let me live that commitment and become the excellence in medicine that you inculcate into your students.

In fact though, my own personal experiences have intensified the deep loyalty that I regard for this school. In my first year here I failed numerous exams and during that year the make-up examinations that I was obliged to take precluded me from using any time of midwinter vacation or spring vacation as time off. I did not feel sorry for myself, after all, I was eating the meal that I had prepared and I simply did not work hard enough to earn the luxury of a break. Nonetheless, think of what that does to the psyche. Think back to the pressures of when you were in medical school and imagine not being afforded a time-out. What does that do to a person?

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The next year, my second year of medical school, was different in that I was decelerated and my performance improved. That year I failed the biochemistry make-up course and appeared before this committee. The regret I feel for not taking every precaution to ensure my future success at the school that I love is enormous. Obviously this committee felt that I needed a serious wake-up call and only after appealing the first decision was I granted the privilege of continuing my education here. There came a warning, however, that there was no more room for error. Any leeway provided to other students would not be afforded to me. The luxury of a low pass would also not be tolerated and would instigate another invitation to a committee meeting. Taking a long hard look at myself I had to admit that I was scared. How would I hold up to such accountability? The upcoming year would be extremely demanding and on what past success could I even believe in myself that I was capable of those demands? That level of pressure is remarkable, but you gave me another chance and for that I was very grateful. Still it is a fascinating exercise to place yourselves temporarily in my shoes and meditate on the emotional and psychological ramifications of this responsibility. Furthermore all my friends that I began school with, close friends that danced at my wedding, were starting their rotations and moving ahead of my pace. Again the question is raised, what does that do to a person?

At the start of my third year here I wanted nothing more than to earn the good faith that was granted to me by this committee. Moving on campus, using tutors for every course, scheduling study partners, spending endless hours in the library, and making my presence at every lecture as critical as my morning coffee was the regular baseline of activity that your message had pushed through. Truly, though, what had lasting consequences and was the stick used to measure me were my good test results. By virtue of passing scores, that year stands as a reliable indication of a strong knowledge base. That year is what gives me the courage to ask that I may continue learning the art of medicine in this great school. That year instilled in me the trait of functioning productively under pressure. The pressure of walking towards the bulletin board on the 6<sup>th</sup> floor Belfer building after each examination that was akin to a man walking into a courtroom to hear his sentencing. Thankfully, with much hard work, the words 'not guilty' resounded in Belfer many times that year. However, what type of attitude does working under those conditions engender? How does that affect a person?

The USMLE Step 1 examination is a painful subject to discuss. It was when the gravel slammed down with finality, muting out the diminishing echoes of 'guilty'. It hurts to admit the underlying cause of my failure, namely that I just did not have a comprehensive grasp of the material. This was not due to a lack of time to adequately prepare or a lack of quantity of studying during that time. I am disappointed and embarrassed that so much effort on my part did not yield results. Everyone is aware that this exam is the most challenging one that we face. The clinical vignette style questions and the time limitations are additional hurdles besides simply absorbing the large body of knowledge. I underestimated my ability to leap over these hurdles, but the real fault lay with the quality of my preparation.

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These past months I have been immured in USMLE review and have exhausted every angle to improve my grasp of the material. I attended live lectures, acquired a study partner that I still meet with, and I purchased study material better suited to a comprehensive and deep understanding of what is required. Essentially I started from scratch and with every review my understanding deepens, the material enmeshes itself tighter in my memory, and my scores on practice exams go up a notch. I do not pretend that a new impressive score on the USMLE will excuse the previous error of sitting for that exam unprepared. I made an estimation based on practice scores and time spent reviewing. That was a display of bad judgment, of not performing a thorough investigation that would leave no doubt as to my test readiness.

The aforementioned psychological question is even more pertinent now. To miss the very last exam at the brink of completing a successful year and ultimately facing the devastating decision of the committee was disheartening. It must affect ones viewpoint somehow.

When I entered Albert Einstein four years ago I believed that that this school would change me, but I am before you surprised at myself by how much I have grown, by how much I have come to learn about myself. I have seen this miraculous transformation in my friends here as well. This place is magic; it is a cocoon that envelops us and makes us beautiful when we spread our wings for the first time. These past four years I have been obligated to renew myself repeatedly. At times this was difficult, but there was a secret ingredient. This ingredient was enhanced with every challenge and exhibited a stronger effect on the dish. I chose Albert Einstein because I love the ideals, values, and education that it stands for. That love has grown every time that I infused myself with a renewed vitality to face an exam again. It entwined itself in my essence when I see my fellow students graduate, when I see the goal realized in the friends that I care so deeply for. Wendell Phillips once said, "The best education in the world is that got by struggling to get a living." I would like to suggest that perhaps the best education in the world is really that got by struggling to get an education! Psychologically the dedication and perseverance has nurtured a loyalty to this college and to medicine that will never die. I believe in recognizing the good that is done for you and returning the favor. That is why I love creating medical presentations, that is why I have aspirations to write a book, and that is why I still tutor students in the college I graduated from for free. The place we grow up in becomes a part of us and I will make every sacrifice to never let that part of me go.

Now I am faced with a dilemma when I make future guarantees to this committee. Yes, I will make every sacrifice to thrive here, but how can I make promises that I cannot keep. When I stood before this committee a year past I made those promises and meant them. I do not have the chutzpah or the stupidity to say now, "No more failure!" even though I feel an iron resolve never to do so. Even though I would sooner step on ground glass then step into an examination without practically incontrovertible proof of my knowledge. Given the precarious situation that I brought upon myself with my first year here, precautions have become necessary. One failure for me does not carry the same weight as one failure of a student with a clean slate. Practically I will make a schedule

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that will allow me extra time of shelf review before beginning the rotation. This approach will maximize my chances of passing every shelf and hopefully give me the success that I know that each and every one of you would prefer to give me. Notwithstanding my resolve, we do not know what the future holds, and I accept the consequences of that uncertainty. I do not regret the decision that I made to stay here the past four years and I will never regret staying longer.

The experiences that I have had at Einstein, my successes and failures have helped me become who I am today. It is fitting that at this school, with the namesake it carries, is where I have met such challenges. Every year at orientation the same speech is given. It tells of the challenges that Albert Einstein faced. His difficulties at school and his challenges in finding and keeping a job. Would Albert choose not to believe in me the same way that no one believed in him? He gave more than just his name to this school, he gave his legacy. We decorate our halls with his inspiration, but of what worth is it if we do not carry his message in our hearts. Members of the committee, I do not even reach the toes of the greatness of our founder. I am but a medical student who is deeply mired in the mistakes of his past. But I believe in the life that Albert lived and the wisdom he imparted to us. Hence, I stand before you resolute in my decision to heal those that want in health. My passion for medicine has faced tough challenges that threatened to extinguish its flames. A strong wind can blow out a fire or can fan it. This school, Albert Einstein College of Medicine, is a school for those who stay loyal to what they know is true in their hearts and keep the fire alive, a school for a man like myself who nursed those fires so that they still blaze today. Yes I am asking you for another chance, the opportunity to complete here what I have started four years past. The opportunity to continue to drink from the well of knowledge that you have opened for me. Still, just as importantly I am imploring you to be inspired by the life of the man who in 1945 radically changed the course of the world by building the tools of destruction. The man who, in 1955, changed the world yet again by building the tools of life. Let us celebrate our 50 years by remembering that we are a community of students, faculty and administrators who represent the ideals of a man who believed in imagination more than knowledge. A man who said that the aim (of education) must be the training of independently acting and thinking individuals who, however, can see in the service to the community their highest life achievement.

Thank-you,

Michael Tyberg

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